

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BAGHDA 00490 220816Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-08 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04
H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01
SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 IO-13 OMB-01 TRSE-00 DHA-02
SSM-03 MCT-01 ACDA-07 /103 W
-----220840Z 035617 /17

R 220638Z MAR 77
FM USINT BAGHDAD
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4305
INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 0490

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, PORG, XF, XA
SUBJECT: IRAQ ASSUMES LOW PROFILE AT AFRO-ARAB SUMMIT AND
REMAINS POLITICALLY ISOLATED

REF: CAIRO 4124

1. BASED ON A ROUND OF TALKS BETWEEN USINT OFFICERS
AND ARAB DIPLOMATIC COLLEAGUES IN BAGHDAD, IT APPEARS
THAT IRAQ PLAYED A MINOR ROLE IN AFRO-ARAB SUMMIT
CONFERENCE. THIS IS TRUE DEPITE MAJOR PLAY GIVEN
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PAGE 02 BAGHDA 00490 220816Z

TO CONFERENCE IN IRAQ MEDIA AND FULSOME EXPRESSIONS
BOTH OF SUMMIT'S IMPORTANCE AND OF SATISFACTION WITH
ITS OUTCOME.

2. DIPLOMATIC OBSERVERS IN BAGHDAD AGREE THAT
IRAQ HAS SOUGHT DURING PAST YEAR TO FIND A MEAN-
INGFUL ROLE FOR ITSELF IN AFRICAN POLITICS. THIS

OBJECTIVE IS OF A PIECE WITH IRAQ'S EFFORTS ON SEVERAL FRONTS TO BREAK OUT OF DIPLOMATIC ISOLATION. HOWEVER, AS IN MOST OTHER INSTANCES, IRAQIS SEEM UNWILLING TO GIVE UP FIRMLY HELD POSITIONS IN PURSUIT OF MORE ACTIVE ROLE THAT THEY DESIRE. SINGLE MOST SIGNIFICANT DECISION ON PART OF IRAQ DURING PREPARATIONS FOR AFRO-ARAB SUMMIT WAS THAT IRAQI STRONGMAN SADDAM HUSSEIN WOULD NOT ATTEND. DECISION OF IRAQI LEADERSHIP TO SEND VICE PRESIDENT TAHA MA'ROUF WAS TAKEN IN FACT OF STRONG URGING BY EGYPTIAN AMBASSADOR TO BAGHDAD, AND PERHAPS BY EGYPTIAN FOREIGN MINISTER FAHMY, THAT PRESENCE OF SADDAM HUSSEIN IN PLACE OF AILING PRESIDENT BAKR WOULD BE SIGNAL IRAQI CONTRIBUTION TO SUCCESS OF CONFERENCE. OUR ARAB COLLEAGUES DIFFER SOMEWHAT IN THEIR VIEWS AS TO WHY SADDAM HUSSEIN DECLINED THE HONOR. IT IS THOUGHT BY MOST THAT INTERNAL SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS WERE UPPERMOST IN HIS MIND IN WAKE OF SERIOUS DISTURBANCES AMONG SHIA POPULATION COUPLED WITH BACKGROUND OF CONTINUING KURDISH DISSIDENCE. A SECOND REASON, WHICH AT LEAST ONE SENIOR ARAB DIPLOMAT VIEWS AS THE PRIMARY ONE, WAS DESIRE OF IRAQI LEADERSHIP TO AVOID ANY MEANINGFUL CONTACT WITH ARAB LEADERS WHO DO NOT ENJOY BAGHDAD'S FAVOR. THIS WOULD BE PARTICULARLY TRUE FOR SYRIAN PRESIDENT ASSAD, BUT IS ALSO TRUE FOR JORDANIAN KING HUSSEIN, SAUDI PRINCE FAHD, AND PERHAPS PLO LEADER ARAFAT AND EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT SADAT. SADDAM HUSSEIN WAS NOT PREPARED

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PAGE 03 BAGHDA 00490 220816Z

AT THIS TIME TO SIT AT THE SAME TABLE WITH ASSAD AND WAS APPREHENSIVE THAT HIS PRESENCE IN CAIRO MIGHT BE INTERPRETED AS IRAQ PARTICIPATION IN AN ATTEMPT TO FORMULATE AN ARAB POSITION TOWARD PROPOSALS FOR SETTLEMENT WITH ISRAEL.

3. PROBABLY AS A COMBINATION OF THE TWO REASONS CITED ABOVE, IRAQ'S REPRESENTATIVE WAS VICE PRESIDENT MA'ROUF, AN EXPERIENCED PROFESSIONAL DIPLOMAT OF KURDISH ORIGIN WHO COULD BE RELIED UPON TO SCRUPULOUSLY FOLLOW HIS INSTRUCTIONS. FROM OUR VANTAGE POINT, WE ARE UNABLE TO STATE WITH PRECISION THE LIST OF LEADERS WITH WHOM MA'ROUF CONFERRED, BUT LOCAL PRESS AND FBIS DID PROVIDE DAILY SUMMARY OF HIS ACTIVITIES. THERE IS NO INDICATION THAT HE OR FOREIGN MINISTER HAMMADI, WHO ACCOMPANIED HIM, MET WITH REPRESENTATIVE OF SYRIA, JORDAN, OR SAUDI ARABIA. HE DID MEET WITH CONFERENCE HOST SADAT FOR WHAT HAS BEEN DESCRIBED TO US AS

A POLITE DISCUSSION THAT RESULTED IN DISAGREEMENTS ON REGIONAL POLICY ISSUES BUT AGREEMENT TO IMPROVE BILATERAL RELATIONS. EGYPTIAN AMBASSADOR IN BAGHDAD IS CONCERNED, HOWEVER, THAT BAGHDAD MEDIA HAS STEPPED UP LEVEL OF SNIPING AT EGYPT IN WAKE OF CONFERENCE. MA'ROUF ALSO MET WITH LEBANESE PRESIDENT SARKIS, WHICH HOPEFULLY INDICATES THAT IRAQ IS PREPARED TO MAKE SOME MATERIAL CONTRIBUTION TO LEBANESE RECONSTRUCTION OR AT LEAST NOT TO SUPPORT EFFORTS BY IRAQ'S REJECTIONIST ALLIES IN LEBANON TO SUBVERT THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT. FINALLY, MA'ROUF CONFERRED WITH ARAFAT, BUT THEIR MEETING CAME AGAINST A BACKGROUND OF BROADCAST FROM BAGHDAD WHICH CHIDED ARAFAT FOR MEETING WITH HUSSEIN.

4. IRAQ, ACCORDING TO OUR INFORMATION, DID NOT PLEDGE ANY SUPPORT TO THE ARAB FUND FOR AFRICAN
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PAGE 04 BAGHDA 00490 220816Z

DEVELOPMENT. ONE EXPLANATION FOR IRAQI UNWILLINGNESS TO CONTRIBUTE TO FUND WAS ITS UNHAPPINESS WITH SAUDI STYLE IN PRESENTING THEIR CONTRIBUTION, WHICH WOULD CERTAINLY HAVE OVERSHADOWED ANY LEVEL OF IRAQI GENEROSITY. WE HAVE HEARD THAT IRAQ CONTRIBUTED ONE MILLION DOLLARS TO THE NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT FOR AFRICA, ALTHOUGH IRAQI CONTRIBUTION WAS NOT MENTIONED IN CAIRO MENA REPORT OF MARCH 9.

5. COMMENT: ONCE AGAIN, IRAQ HAS FAILED TO SEIZE AN OPPORTUNITY TO ASSERT LEADERSHIP ROLE WHICH ITS HUMAN AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES COULD COMMAND. RESTRAINTS IMPOSED BY INTERNAL SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS, IDEOLOGICAL RIGIDITY, AND INFLEXIBILITY TOWARD ARAB NEIGHBORS APPEAR TO BE STRONGER AT THIS TIME THAN IRAQI ASPIRATIONS FOR REGIONAL LEADERSHIP.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: SPHERE OF INFLUENCE, SUMMIT MEETINGS
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Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977BAGHDA00490
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770097-0707
Format: TEL
From: BAGHDAD
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
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Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770337/aaaabfqj.tel
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Litigation History:
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Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 CAIRO 4124
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 16-Nov-2004 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3040918
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: IRAQ ASSUMES LOW PROFILE AT AFRO-ARAB SUMMIT AND REMAINS POLITICALLY ISOLATED
TAGS: PFOR, PORG, XF, XA, IZ
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/6cfd34b4-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009